

THE LASER - A SH

THE LASER 200 IS THE CHEAPEST COLOUR COMPUTER IN THE UK. BUT WITH A SMALL MEMORY OF ONLY 4K AS STANDARD, the Laser looks familiar, don't worry — there is a good reason. Those readers with long memories will recall a micro called the Tixel TX8000, which we reviewed in our March 1983 issue.

At that time we were not too enthusiastic about the TX8000's future, and this pessimism seems to have been justified. After a couple of months we stopped hearing about it, and it was assumed that the machine was extinct. The recent introduction of the Laser, now being handled in this country by Computers For All, brought the same computer back into circulation in a modified form with £30 chopped off the

price. And the Laser may well have a brighter future ahead of it at £70 for the 4K computer plus £30 for a 16K RAM pack.

The machine remains fundamentally similar. It is an elegant-looking micro in a tough plastic case, slightly larger than the Spectrum and about the same size as an Oric. At the heart of the Laser is the familiar Z80A central processor, and a rather inadequate 4K of RAM.

From the outside, the Laser is considerably more impressive than some of the sub-£100 micros we have seen in recent months. Sporting such daring innovations as an on/off switch (one

better than the ZX81, Spectrum, Acorn Electron and many others), and a monitor outlet for connection to a monochrome monitor (a major bonus for eye-strained programmers), there is no evidence of over-zealous activity by the cost-cutting department.

Apart from the usual cassette interface and a UHF outlet for connection to a domestic television set, the rear edge of the computer also carries a pair of neat plates. When unscrewed, these uncover a pair of Sinclair-style edge connectors, devoted to the optional 16K RAM pack and a Sordisha dot matrix printer.

The Laser keyboard is rather better

NOT IN THE DARK?

DARD. WILL THE NEED FOR AN EXTRA 16K RAM PACK MAKE THE LASER AN EASY TARGET FOR THE £99 SPECTRUM?

than that of some of its rivals, and entering our test programs was notably quick and easy. The light action of the keys, combined with a quiet 'blip' when the appropriate letter is generated, leaves the inexperienced user free to look at the keyboard rather than the screen.

Complete non-typists are also catered for, since by depressing the Control key with another key, a complete Basic keyword is produced. Having the option of this method is much more satisfactory than the compulsory usage imposed by the various Sinclair machines, where it often takes longer to find a short keyword on the cluttered keyboard than it would to

tap it in, letter by letter.

Our only complaint with the keyboard is that when typing at speed, a key would occasionally stick down, and the fast auto repeat would then produce a maddening series of blips as the screen filled with unwanted characters.

Remembering the somewhat crude internal construction of the Textet, we opened up the sturdy case expecting the worst. It was a pleasant surprise to see that the internal layout has been changed, suggesting that Video Technology, the Oriental manufacturer of the Laser, has not been idle in the last few months.

The standard of electronic workmanship

is still not as high as that produced by leading European and American manufacturers, but the ugly blobs of glue have vanished and the soldering seems considerably neater than before.

Plugging in the external power supply (now of the type fitted with a separate plug at the end of a lead) we switched on, to see if these changes had been reflected in the Laser's performance as a computer.

The Basic remains very close to the 8K Microsoft which many readers will know. There are still no handy toolkit commands, such as a line or variable trace, line renumber facility or even automatic line numbering, but the Basic is a known



